

(1855)

AN
ORATION,
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
TAMMANY SOCIETY,
OR
COLUMBIAN ORDER;

ON THEIR
Anniversary, held at their Wigwam,

IN THE
CITY OF NEW-YORK,

The 12th of May, 1853, and published at their request.

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BY SAMUEL COWDREY,

A CITIZEN OF NEW-YORK.

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1703

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DELIVERED AT THE

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EDWIN PATRICK KILROE

COLLECTION OF TAMMANIANA

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NEW YORK

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PRINTED BY JAMES CHRISTIAN

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Tammaniana
of
Edwin Patrick Kilroe
No. 1855

The following Oration is not considered by the Author as entitled to the honor of publication, nor viewed with the fondness of a candidate for public applause. It was thrown together under circumstances by no means favorable to composition, and nothing but the flattering manner in which a copy was requested by the Society before which it was pronounced could have induced him to hazard its appearance before the eye of criticism. He only begs leave to say further, that he has used many quotations, though they are not properly designated on account of their frequency, and also the inaccuracy to which he was subject by trusting to recollection only.

ORATION, &c.

WHEN in the course of events it becomes the duty of a young disciple in eloquence to address those who are his superiors, as well in theoretical knowledge as in wisdom, resulting from practical life, a respect to the attainments of the former, and the experience of the latter, requires all that diffidence which nature hath implanted, and with which even the most aspiring ought to be impressed. And this is the more readily acknowledged, from the consideration, that on this day, our imaginations have frequently been warmed, our sympathies excited, and our memories impressed by the energetic, the tender, and the lofty recitals of Tammany's distinguished sons. And shall a feeble light be seen where these have blazed? Shall the bright constellation formed by the lustre of their rays, admit some younger star? Shall the lisping tongue be heard along the walls which have rung with the silver accents of the sage, reverberated the thunders of patriotism, and echoed the praises of whatever can raise the genius, or mend the heart? Spirit beyond the mountains! where thou drinkest the pure stream and enjoyest the fresh breeze, where the spring sheds perpetual odours on thy head, and day and night are but the witnesses of thy repose, 'tis thy votaries I obey, and they have spoken thy will; and the reflection that I am owned by them as a brother, and can apply to each of them the same epithet, imparts confidence to my hopes, that they will observe with indulgence and strength to my exertions to think, to speak, and to act as becomes such an elevated station.

SACHEMS, BROTHERS, AND FELLOW CITIZENS,

WE are assembled, not to commemorate a common event, or even one of those rare occurrences which affect us because they are beautiful or astonishing merely, but we celebrate the triumphs of that genius whose path was illuminated by the great and good Spirit, by whose operations a new world was proclaimed to the old, and a scene the most interesting to civilized man, opened to his admiring view. Whether the discovery of America is to be considered as beneficial or injurious to the other quarters of the globe, and particularly to Europe, is a question which the politicians of those countries may discuss and decide as they think proper, and as their interests, their feelings, or their prejudices may lead them. But can we, the inhabitants of its soil, and the partakers of its bounties, help exclaiming with fervor, our lines are fallen on pleasant places, yea we have a goodly heritage! And particularly when we contemplate that portion of it which we enjoy, and consider the numerous advantages resulting

to us as a nation, can we repress those pleasing, those grateful emotions that the peculiar goodness of Providence so powerfully calls forth, or that pride of birth, that sentiment of exultation, and that glow of patriotism which are excited by the contemplation? Americans! cast your eyes on every side. View the Mississippi and St. Croix rolling their waves along your borders, the Atlantic dashing your shores, the lakes that decorate your frontiers, swelling into seas, sending their floods with majestic course along your wide extended country, and watering your fruitful fields—Behold the chain of mountains that variegate and aggrandize the prospect, their summits rising to heaven in bold defiance of its terrors, their feet forming vallies where milder scenes are displayed; your territory enriched with the varying seasons, and uniting the advantages of every climate, producing health, plenty and every convenience, and nourishing the whole mineral, vegetable, and animal world—Examine the physical wonders that press themselves on the view, and ask if there be any thing beautiful, astonishing, or sublime, that is not spread before you in superabundant profusion? If these only are considered, we may challenge a comparison with any part of the world, and take an unlimited range in the wilds of Nature.

Nor less can we admire the moral than the physical benefacts with which we are favoured. Religion, clothed in her native simplicity, here conducts her votaries to the temple, and wins their affections by her intrinsic excellence. She asks no tribute but the honest sincerity of the heart, points out no duties but what the conscience imposes, and directs to no object but God her author. Not as in the old world, the institutes of the fairest of whose portions have been marked with hideous deformity, by the idolatrous superstitions of heathenism, the usurpations of papacy, and the intolerance of protestantism, where, clothed in the meretricious ornaments of a pagan imagination, she served only to pervert the understanding, and corrupt the heart; or, arrayed in popish terrors, frightened her followers from the sanctuary, or has been supplanted by bigotry, which usurped her honors and palliated her influence—where man sighing after truth was deceived with its counterfeit; and delusion with her dreams, mystery with her veils, and fiction with her shadows, completed the subjugation of his moral energies. We may pride ourselves also in point of morals. In this respect, we have a decided preference to any nation on earth; and it may be esteemed a very singular felicity if the present system should be preserved from degeneracy, though perhaps it admits of considerable improvement. The American character, when contrasted with the vivacity and frivolity of the French, which, whether a Bourbon expires on the scaffold, and a complicated system of tyranny is exterminated; whether liberty hovers around the horizon and almost completes their emancipation, or a Buonaparte seizes the fit moment, and by a mighty effort, paralyzes their empire and brings it to do homage at the shrine of his genius; whether they bow to a monster of 500 heads, or that

number be reduced to three, and under every circumstance of either success or defeat, prosperity or adversity, still renders them light, airy, and trifling, the dupes of artifice, the victims of design, and the minions of authority; or the indolent, luxurious, jealous, and phlegmatic disposition of their neighbours the Spanish; the revengeful and cruel nature of the Portuguese; the effeminacy of the Italian; the heaviness of the Dutch, or the proud, haughty and domineering spirit of the British, and others that might be mentioned, I say the American character will gain by a comparison with all or either of these. But I will not sacrifice sincerity to complaisance, nor truth to flattery. Whether it is from the removal of exciting causes, or a principle in nature, that uniformity in any one particular cannot long be preserved, the reason of which is inscrutable to the human understanding, it is certain that there has been a manifest deterioration in this respect. The feelings and sentiments of former times seem to have departed with the occasions that gave rise to them, and to have retired with the deepening shades of time. Where is that glow of genius that once pervaded every bosom, and gave a vivid colouring to every object; that moved with electric celerity, and communicated its pulsations to distant climes? Its lustre has been obscured, and its operation obstructed by the deleterious influence of other passions. But, Americans! contemplate for a moment the former scenes of its action, and let your bosoms again distend with the throb sacred to virtue, to patriotism, and to glory. Let the drama written in blood and recorded on high, wherein thousands of Americans poured out at the shrine of their country, the pure oblation of their hearts' best treasure, and pledged in defence of her rights, their lives, their fortunes, and their honor, pass in review before you; and while you feel an honest pride in the glory that encircles their names—while you exult in their triumphs, and go with them in the gloomy hour of defeat—while you are lost in amazement at the contemplation of deeds so unparalleled as grace the authors and promoters of our revolutionary struggle, behold the eyes of all nations turned to the event, and acknowledging the pre-eminence of that genius which, at the 59th century of the world, could surpass all that had preceded it in the effects it produced, and the ends it accomplished. Behold the zone that sparkles around the American name and the American character, and ask from whence it derives its lustre? Had the revolutionary contest not happened; had not David rose against Goliath, we should have been to this day a reproach, and a laughing-stock, and a by-word among the nations. But now, while we felicitate ourselves on the acquisition of independence, our self-congratulation, or that sentiment which may be called pride, and in the present instance national pride receives a new stimulus from the consideration that our example has attracted the attention of the whole world, and that the spirit of '76 has gone forth like a giant, rejoicing in his strength, to break in pieces every yoke; to unfetter the captive, and to proclaim to man how vast are his

powers, how much he may accomplish, and how much he may enjoy. Ye shades of departed greatness, of illustrious heroes and patriots, all hail! To you we bend with pleasing awe, and own how rich the prize ye won; how great the debt we owe—Do ye still watch the scenes of your valor, where dangers threatened, but glory absorbed them in its blaze, and where humanity and honor pleaded your cause; but the ambition, no! the cruelty of your opponents emerged them in its vortex: do ye still watch with solicitude lest other swords should gleam and other cannons roar; lest other streams should flow, and other spirits quit their kindred forms in the same cause for which ye fought, or is it to reproach your descendants, nay, your brothers in arms, by pointing them to your relics, and asking them for a covering from the storm; or does your errand, like the actions ye performed, spring from a nobler principle, and a more elevated motive—an inexterminable love of Columbia's favored land, and an anxiety lest it should be disgraced by the negligence, the declension, or the corruption of her sons? And there living patriots who claim an equal share in our affections, and whose example can only be forgotten with the consciousness which informs us, and when memory herself shall cease.

But let us turn from reflections of this nature, to those which our present exigencies are calculated to excite. And who among us that is warmed with the love of his country, that respects himself, or venerates the rights of human nature, does not dwell with fondness on the contemplation of America; America, as yet the seat of every blessing? See the devastations that have been committed in the transatlantic world, where empires have been convulsed, dismembered, ransacked and destroyed; where systems, the accumulated growth of ages, have been revolutionized; where man has been the suffering victim, and tyrants have been the bloody executioners, where outrage, havock and ruin have usurped the soil of peace, liberty and the muses, and left them not a refuge nor even a hiding-place.

My countrymen, we are yet free, independent and happy—We have only partook of the scenes that have been mentioned by sympathy, and cold indeed is that bosom which does not feel for the woes of humanity; which does not vibrate at the touch of its sufferings, and kindle into resentment at the wrongs that have been committed on mankind.

And if we are wise, if we improve from the examples that have passed before us, we shall learn to value our country and the advantages we enjoy; to honor the one and preserve the other; and to perpetuate them unimpaired to generations yet unborn. In order to this, the union which now subsists must be guarded with the utmost scrupulosity and vigilance. But an opinion has been rumoured and gained a partial publicity, that a separation of the states of America ought to be made. With whom this has originated it is not necessary to enquire. It made its appearance in the east, and has been reiterated from the

west. But I hope for the honor of my countrymen at large, that their approbation of the measure has fallen far short of even such circumscribed expressions of it, and may this crude and inchoate surmise, like the raven from the ark, find not a place whereon to rest, but return to the chaos of that brain whence it wandered at first, and perish in everlasting forgetfulness. Let it not seem strange that the speaker should on this occasion presume to offer his sentiments on a subject of such dignified importance, as the preservation of the union of the states of America. While he is sensible that no other can be more interesting; that no other demands more attention; that no other superior in magnitude can be agitated, he trembles with apprehension lest he should, by the feebleness of his efforts, rather shew the weakness of his own powers, than the strength of the arguments he may adopt on the occasion. But the result may be anticipated already: in contemplating the subject, the speaker is overlooked; his reasoning is lost in the flood of conviction which rushes on the mind, and every American is ready to exclaim with the ingenuousness of sincerity, and the ardor of patriotism, long live my country, free and united. In this is but echoed the voice of the heroes who have fought, who have bled, who have died in her cause. And shall it at the distance of seven and twenty years from the period when *united* she rose in pursuit of her independence, and with *united* efforts struggled in defence of her rights; shall it I say, within so short a period of time, be recorded on her annals, that her toils, that her victories have become fruitless? (for this will be the case in the event of a separation.) Where is the hand that shall write the disgraceful memento; where the breast hardy enough to entertain the design? And if these should be found, may we not hope, nay prophecy, that the guardian genius of America, at sight of the deed, will drop a tear on the record, and blot it out for ever? It is impossible to reflect on such a measure without feeling the liveliest emotions; and while engaged in the consideration of it, the warmest enthusiasm will be certain of excuse. In deciding upon it, we should feel as though we were deciding the fate of our country; as if we held her destinies in our hands, and were able by our individual resolve, to precipitate her from the exalted height at which she stands, to the lowest depths of ruin, and hurl from its seat, the pride, the boast, and the glory of the world, to ignominy and eternal disgrace.

The first and necessary consequence of a separation of the states would be a total, an entire destruction of our present happy constitution. That constitution in which are centered the interest, the prosperity, and the happiness of our country, on which depend all our hopes and expectations as a nation, and to the preservation of which our individual anxieties ought to be directed. And if this is destroyed, my life on it, says the orator in the Senate House, you will never have another. The propitious moment is past, and will never return, when animated with the same mutual wishes, the citizens of America

assembled to form the confederation. The point of time at which our government was established was the only one which could be seized with any prospect of success. The states were just relieved from the burthens which had oppressed them; they were just released from the ties and obligations that connected them with each other, each had its particular interests, its peculiar views, its private jealousies. It was at that point of time when the sword which had just been sheathed, was about to be drawn in civil and intestine warfare, that the patriots of '87 held forth to the people of the states of America, a government which healed the divisions just ready to break forth, and established on the broad basis of equal rights and equal laws, the fair fabric of our independence. And shall this government, though novel in its structure, and the child of experiment, yet the best hope of the world, thus suddenly crumble into ruins and perish in the wreck of time, while we possibly can save it? Forbid it my countrymen, forbid it Heaven! Will not the same dissensions, the same feuds, the same violent passions prompt the hostile attack at the present period, should our government be destroyed, that threatened the repose and the prosperity of America, at the time of its adoption? Yes they will—Human nature is still the same; we are still under the dominion of our passions, and when these are stimulated by the impulse of party animosities and party resentments, who shall answer for the consequences? Who shall bear the fierceness of that wrath which will kindle against the base incendiary, or who shall support the accumulated load of vengeance, which, with a mighty impetus, shall descend on his devoted head? Has not the prophetic eye already been extended to the downfall of our government? Is not our constitution supposed already to have received a fatal wound? and can we doubt the patriotism or the virtue of those who have warned us of our danger, and deplored the prospect of its speedy approach? Can we possibly suspect their motives, when they, at the same time, have told us that we are ruined when we cease to pay taxes, that we are a herd incapable of self-government, and that we are our own worst enemies; that our mouths must be stopped; that we must have a standing army in preference of a militia establishment, and in times of peace; that we must have a permanent navy to defend commerce, which is always fluctuating, and protect the merchant at the expence of the mechanic, the husbandman, and every other member of the community; that we must fight rather than negotiate; that energy must supercede the mild, calm and temperate spirit that pervades our government, and that national honor which means any thing, must be preferred to national happiness, which includes every thing? Have they not shewn the most tender concern for whatever relates to the letters, syllables and words that compose the charter of our liberties, while they overlooked its spirit; have they not made a stand against the smallest encroachment on the members, while they have attacked the body, and shrunk with apprehension lest a drop of blood should be

Spilt in defence of a violated, prostituted and ruined constitution; while they have founded the tocsin of alarm at the depredations of an inferior agent; while they themselves would, on various occasions and pretences, have led the way to rapine, disaster and destruction? And all this under the mask of patriotism, public spirit, and virtue! But virtue, which I will here consider in its broad and most extended meaning; virtue I say, that is real, unfeigned and unadorned, needs not the meretricious ornaments with which venal orators are accustomed to decorate its substitutes, nor the sly necromancy, affected solemnity, and retiring policy with which statesmen sometimes disguise their conduct and their professions. It may be safely affirmed, that virtue never shuns the light. Virtue, where it is inherent, intrinsic and unassumed, has charms that attract the attention, and engage the affections of every moral agent. There is something so irresistible in its nature, and so fitted to the corresponding emotions of the heart, that we love it from sympathy and intuitive approbation. And when its characters are drawn at length and presented to view in colours of life, we cannot refuse the spontaneous tribute of the understanding, we bend in profound acknowledgment of its beauty, its grandeur, its sublimity. It elevates while it adorns, and fills with awe while it animates with springing delight. Possessing such excellencies, it is entitled to universal homage, and wherever it is found, whether sparkling in the front of a chief magistrate, or gilding the peasant's cot, whether decorating the hero's brow and illuminating the path of glory, or shining through the cell of obscurity and indigence, it claims the untaught admiration of every beholder.

But virtue, like every thing else that is fair and of good report, has many counterfeits; and it may sometimes require a considerable share of skill to distinguish these from the prototype in the same manner as a base coin will frequently deceive the honest and unsuspecting. In morals, in politics, and in religion, the grossest impositions are often practised, and their perpetrators assuming the mask of sincerity, go about like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour, though sometimes indeed they resemble snakes in the grass, that kill with their venomous bite, without the least warning of their approach. Instead of scattering fire-brands, arrows and death, openly and in the face of day, they are like the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and it may be said of them, as of things incorporeal, *nec videri nectangi*.

But let us resume the subject from which we have digressed, and pursue it a few steps further. It is said by the wise men of the east, that there ought to be a separation of the states, because the manners of their southern and western brethren are so totally dissimilar from theirs, because the Alleghany mountains form the natural boundary and line of demarkation between eastern and western America, and form political differences between them. They say that light cannot associate with darkness; that their purity cannot be assimilated with the

depravity that there prevails ; that God and Mammon cannot be blended. That the incest of such a connection would taint the whole atmosphere with more than epidemic infection. But to what lengths will not party spirit lead its votaries ; how does it pervert their judgment and mislead their will ? It is in vain to talk of a partial separation ; that is, that there should be two republics instead of one. This I say, is impossible from the nature of our government. It is defined to be a confederation by which several states agree to become members of a larger one. It is a kind of assemblage of societies that constitute a new one. In fact, it is a whole made up of its parts ; take away one and parts only remain. You destroy the whole body, you change its nature from that of a whole to a mere assemblage of discordant materials. It is like a chain, which, if one link is destroyed, becomes totally incapable of answering the purposes for which it was intended. And even if this were possible, to what innumerable dangers would our country be exposed ? But would the love, the affection we entertain for it be extinguished by the adoption of such a measure ? Should we indeed be indifferent spectators of the fate of the dismembered portion ? should we in fact consider ourselves as exonerated from the obligations by which we are now bound together ? No ! the thrill of patriotism would still pervade our bosoms, and the extremes of the borders would still be our country ; we should plant ourselves in hostile array against every invader, and consider him as aiming an equal blow at one portion as the other.

But it is easily seen, that instead of this, each state would become a distinct and separate sovereignty. And who, in considering this state of things, does not feel an involuntary dread, a secret, an awful apprehension for the fate which must necessarily await them in this weak and defenceless state ? Look at the Helvetic Republic, and examine the advantages which we enjoy, when compared with such an association. There we have an instance of a federal union, with respect to some certain particulars, and of distinct sovereignties, with respect to others. And would an American bow like the Swiss to some usurper ? would he see the councils of his nation humbled to the lowest degradation, and complying with the most obsequious submission to the nod of an intruder ? Then let us present an impenetrable phalanx cemented by union, not only of interest but sentiment ; not only of appearance, but the heart, against every encroachment. The United Netherlands were an assemblage of societies, but formed no confederate republic, and where are they ? Divided, disgraced, the finest of them numbered among the consular trophies, and enlarging the sphere of gallic domination. And if we travel back to the ages of antiquity, and examine the leagues, the confederacies, or the councils recorded in history, we shall find none of them organized like the confederated republic of America. It was reserved for America

to exhibit to the world an improvement in the theory and practice of government, an example as majestic as it was novel; a concentration of powers for given purposes, inefficient in their operation for the preservation and security of a great nation, extended over a vast and flourishing country, and a peaceful and deliberate assignment of these powers by those who bestowed them to their legal and constituted organs. But if the bands that now unite us are rent asunder; if the system whose movements are now nicely regulated and balanced, should be thrown into confusion, we shall not only fall by reason of our own weakness, and form another instance of the imbecility of republican institutions, but that weakness will allure foreign mercenaries, who will either lead us in triumph at the chariot wheel of ambition, or again sack our towns, plunder our cities, and ravage our coasts. We shall become the sport of faction, and a prey to every daring, rapacious and lawless invader. Those who have ridiculed our constitution, will lift the finger of scorn, and pointing to its ruins, ask where is now your boasted strength; where the palladium of your safety, where your pride and your glory? To their scoffs we shall be able to make no reply; the blush of confusion and shame will tinge the cheek that now glows with resentment at the thought, and we shall be doomed to experience at once the stings of reproach and remorse. Reproach that will justly be heaped upon us, and remorse that, while we might have remained a free, a great and a happy nation, we most unworthily degenerated into supineness, ignominy and contempt. Need motives be assigned to Americans for remaining a united people? are any not satisfied and convinced that in union is our only safety; that united we stand, divided we fall?

The instant the union is dissolved, our relations to foreign nations must cease; our treaties can no longer have any binding force, for it is with the United States of America that they are formed. We shall be let loose at once upon that wild and tumultuous sea of liberty, about which we have heard so much, the incursions of whose waves are prevented by the union that subsists. We shall be reduced to something like a state of nature, and experience all the evils that result from anarchy and confusion, and perhaps prove the truth of that axiom in politics, that from the extremes of these there is a natural progression to the extreme of tyranny. A deadly calm will succeed the agonizing spasms of infuriated man. The American Eagle, now soaring through the vast expanse, will sit forlorn and disconsolate, and the American empire, now exulting in the full tide of successful experiment, will mourn in sack-cloth and ashes. And who can look forward with calmness to that period, when our country shall groan beneath the rod of a despot, and our countrymen, from being the most favored and happy nation on earth, shall dwindle into the abject condition of slaves, and drag a life of servitude, where they now sit under their own vine

and their own fig tree, and there is none to molest them or make them afraid?

Having detained you fellow citizens, and brothers of the Tammany Society, much beyond your patience, and the time usually allotted to the anniversary address, required by our compact of association, I shall now hasten to relieve both you and myself; and suffer me in taking my leave of you, to express a wish that is felt equally by you all, that our country may long be blessed with a wise, a faithful, and a patriotic government; that its interests may always be dear to its citizens, in common with those who preside over its destinies, and its honor, its happiness and prosperity be commensurate with the existence of time. And may the society by whose appointment I stand in this honorable situation, long continue to represent in its structure, the fabric of the American confederation. May it produce many germs of greatness, many ornaments to itself and the nation, and be equally distinguished for its external respectability, for its internal utility, for the excellence of its model, its institutions and its principles: may it remain united and firm; a rock amidst the throes and convulsions that are continually taking place; a pillar to the state, and a refuge to its members, where the harmony of social intercourse may prevail in defiance of all opposition.

SACHEMS, CHIEFS, AND FATHERS IN COUNCIL,

ON you devolves the task of preserving in their pristine purity, the principles with which the Columbian Order is distinguished. From you are expected, not only wisdom and courage in the care of your tribes, but a display of the virtues that are at once the ornament and cement of our association. From you we love to hear the history of former times; how the desert was made to rejoice by our fore-fathers, who conquered the howling tenant, and introduced the song, the dance, and the arts of society. While assembled around the council fire, partaking the bounties of the great spring, and enjoying the calumet of peace, we delight in the recitals of actions when the sinews were strong, the arms nervous, and the arrow flew obedient to their impulse; when youthful vigor flowed through the veins, and the bounding roe yielded to its superior agility. But where are some of those whose presence once gladdened our joys and dissipated our sorrows? Gone forever! the Great Spirit beckoned them and they were obedient. But they sleep in peace. No tigers leap on heedless hunters in those regions consecrated to their repose, and to you, brothers of the Tammany society, it belongs to fill their places in our wigwam, to emulate their good deeds, their virtues, and their heroism, and like them to reap the laurels of renown, which remembrance fondly attaches to their worth. But let us not overlook in our regret for departed merit, those who are still the ornament, the

pride, and the boast of our order: some yet remain as a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path, and gratitude singles out one whose best reward is his own reflections, and the consciousness of his well intended and well directed efforts in the formation and progress of this association. Brothers, let it be always dear to our affections; let its value be duly appreciated; let us nourish its root, and cherish its growth. The tree of peace still overshadows us; may its large leaves and flourishing brambles extend to the setting sun and reach the skies—and under its benignant influence, let us cultivate the spirit of union, of liberty, and of virtue. Let truth, sincerity, and friendship warm every bosom; for by these, and these only, shall we prosper. May the sound of war be always distant from our wigwam. If it should be heard; if the sons of Tammany should be called to unbury the tomahawk, to string the bow and point the arrow, it will be found that those who love liberty know how to defend it. But the Great Spirit who led our fathers on to victory and glory, will shield us with his banners; he still walks on the turrets of America, protects us with his watchful eye, and guards us with a parent's care. Brothers, our chain of union continues strong and bright; let it be extended far and wide, and embrace within its circle the whole American family; and now in the name of the spirits of the departed free, let us depart in peace and friendship.

F I N I S.

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